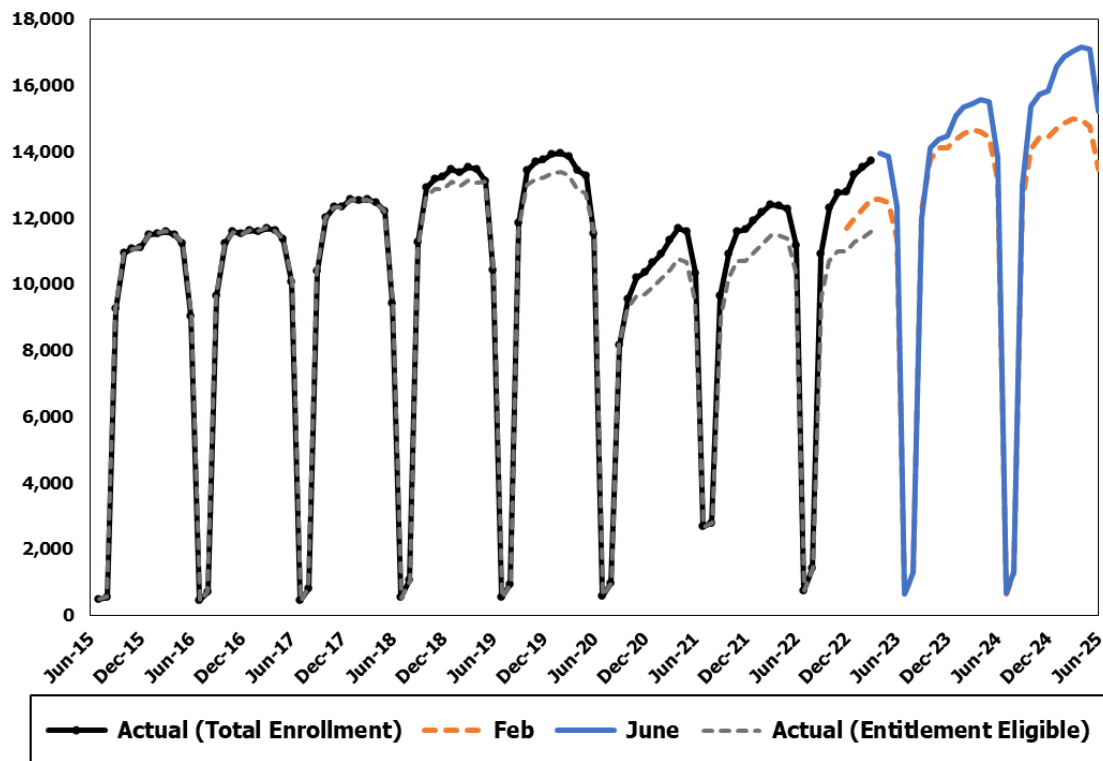


Early Childhood Education and Assistance (ECEAP)

Caseload Forecast Council
June 14, 2023

Early Childhood Education and Assistance



The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) provides comprehensive nutrition, health, education, and family support services to eligible children between the ages of three and five years old who are not eligible for kindergarten to enhance their opportunities for success in the common school system. ECEAP enrollment is forecasted as total annual enrollment calculated as a ten-month average to more accurately reflect that the majority of enrollment occurs during the standard school year.

ECEAP entitlement eligibility is primarily based on a child's age and family income. Historically, the ECEAP caseload forecast has counted only children who are eligible under the current entitlement eligibility standard; however, children otherwise ineligible may also participate under rules adopted by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), provided that the number of such children is no more than 25 percent of enrollment in the program. During the 2021-22 school year, the program served an average of 866 such children per month, an increase over the 656 children per month seen in the 2020-21 school year. These children have not previously been considered part of the official ECEAP caseload. The proposed June forecast includes these children, counting total enrollment as a better reflection of the Caseload Forecast Council's authorizing legislation and a better measure of program participation.

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Forecast Comparisons (Fiscal Year Averages)

Fiscal Year	Feb-23 Forecast	Jun-23 Forecast	Feb to Jun Difference	Percent Difference
2023	11,962	13,153	1,191	10.0%
2024	14,168	14,749	582	4.1%
2025	14,490	16,166	1,676	11.6%

Compared to February, the June 2023 forecast is, on average, 1,191 cases or 10.0 percent higher for FY 2023 and 1,129 cases or 7.9 percent higher for the 2023-25 Biennium. Most this change is due to the proposed shift to a forecast of total program enrollment. The portion of the June forecast that consists of entitlement eligible children only is, on average, 5.8 percent lower than the February forecast for FY 2023 and 14.5% lower for the 2023-25 Biennium.

Tracking the Current Forecast

Month	Feb-23 Forecast	Actual (Prior Eligible)	Variance	Percent Variance
Dec-22	11,688	10,991	-697	-6.0%
Jan-23	11,969	11,282	-687	-5.7%
Feb-23	12,248	11,413	-835	-6.8%
Mar-23	12,540	11,589	-951	-7.6%

Actuals are tracking, on average, 793 cases or 6.5 percent below the February forecast.

Fiscal Year Caseload Change

	Fiscal Year	Caseload (Entitlement Eligible)	Change from Prior Year	Percent Change
Actual	2016	10,965		
	2017	11,294	329	3.0%
	2018	11,989	695	6.2%
	2019	12,660	671	5.6%
	2020	12,955	295	2.3%
	2021	9,964	-2,991	-23.1%
	2022	11,270	1,307	13.1%
Forecast	2023	13,153	1,882	16.7%
	2024	14,749	1,597	12.1%
	2025	16,166	1,417	9.6%

Program enrollment has grown steadily from a low point in the 2020-2021 school year but has not returned to peak pre-pandemic levels. Much of enrollment growth in the current school year has come from children who are not entitlement eligible. The average entitlement caseload over the first seven months of the 2022-23 school year was 3.4 percent higher than in the 2021-2022 school year, while total enrollment over the same period was 11.3 percent higher.

Risks to the Forecast

Risks to this forecast are moderate to high. This forecast assumes that growth in non-entitlement enrollment will continue to drive total caseload growth over the 2023-2025 Biennium, with total enrollment approaching the program's funded capacity in the 2024-25 school year. If the growth in the non-entitlement portion of caseload slows early, enrollment may not reach forecast levels. There is further risk to this forecast in potential competition from other early education options.

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